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ABSTRACT

Student transients in San Diego Unified School District occur as transfers from outside the local district, transfers from within the local district, immigrants from other countries, and dropouts. The 22,000 transient students each year create problems related to: (1) internal organization, staffing, planning, and programs to minimize educational interruption and personal readjustment due to the transiency; (2) programs to take into account non-English-speaking or multilingual pupils in the schools; and (3) a system to accommodate pupils who have withdrawn from another school system without stated intention, preventing records from following in a prompt fashion. Most of the problems could be alleviated by national planning, cooperation, and adequate support for public education. (Author/DW)

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CLINIC A-2: COPING WITH THE TRANSIENT STUDENT

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COPING WITH THE TRANSIENT STUDENT

The topic of the transient student must be discussed within the framework of the individual school district, accompanied by some analysis of the nature of the transient students. The problems encountered will vary extremely in both of these dimensions.

The San Diego Unified School District is a large urban district with more than 123,000 students enrolled in pre-school through grade 12, and more than 170 individual school sites. It is also a very large district in its geographic area of 195 square miles, with relatively inadequate public transportation as compared with many other large cities.

There are several major aspects of transiency with which we deal. The first is transiency consisting of an exchange of students with other school districts as opposed to those who move from school to school within the district. Figures since 1969 compiled by our Research Department indicate that the net exchange of students with other school districts has been below three percent for the period October to June, and slightly higher for the period from June to October. The biggest single known exchange is with other districts in San Diego County. Reasons for granting permits either in or out of the district are of necessity quite limited and closely evaluated since San Diego Unified, not unlike other large urban districts, faces the demands of parents desiring to have their children attend schools in the less troubled suburbs. Close cooperation with administration of neighboring school districts is a necessity. Historically, San Diego Unified has maintained an almost even balance between incoming and outgoing pupils.

Another large factor is the so-called "summer drop" factor. Each summer a number of pupils do not re-enter San Diego schools in September although they were there the previous June. They do not follow the usual withdrawal procedure and until or unless the receiving district requests records, the San Diego schools do not know the destination of such pupils. Meticulously the schools' staff, aided by central guidance personnel, spend many hours attempting to locate these pupils. Upon occasion in the past we have followed through individually as best we could and found that almost all of these pupils do enroll in school elsewhere--hence, they are not dropouts. Interestingly enough, many school districts do not request transcripts.

A larger mobility factor in San Diego is mobility from school to school within the district. From 1967 to the present time this mobility factor has amounted to an average of between seven and eight percent, or approximately 9,000 students per year. This figure only involves residential moves within and in and out of the district. To this must be added an additional 9,000 students who are granted requests to attend a school other than their geographic school of residence for a variety of reasons such as child care, personal and social adjustment, improvement of racial/ethnic balance, and parental hardship. Such internal mobility makes it necessary to do a considerable amount of curriculum and guidance planning. Curriculum sequences must be planned so that a student moving from one school to another will not be moving into a completely new curriculum content or sequence each time he moves. Since there are never enough materials to maintain a completely parallel structure, there are some difficulties in material utilization, although these are minor. Progress reporting must be planned in such a manner that the receiving school will have an idea of the curriculum placement of

a student coming into the school. Most particularly at the secondary level, counseling and programming must be structured in such manner that the incoming student can be programmed immediately so as to avoid interruption in his education. Our districtwide guidance services keep central records of pupils who are experiencing educational difficulties so that a continuity of effort on behalf of these students may be maintained regardless of which school the student attends.

San Diego schools have done two separate studies which relate achievement to transiency. In 1968-69, Stanford Achievement test scores in reading were analyzed for grade 3. Results of this analysis showed that pupils who had been in continuous attendance in one school through grade 3 were higher in reading achievement than pupils who had been in attendance only for grades 2 and 3. These in turn were higher in achievement than those who had been in the school during grade 3 only.

In the academic year 1972-73 some analysis was performed on the California Test of Basic Skills for sixth grade pupils. This analysis showed that pupils who had been in San Diego schools for the full six years were generally better in achievement scores than were pupils who had been in San Diego less than three years. These results were particularly significant for low achieving students.

We have no concrete measures of social adjustment and interpersonal adaptability. However, it has been a frequent observation by our pupil personnel services staff that pupils who have attended a number of schools seem to be more socially confident and more adaptable to new situations and new friends. Because of our large military population we have a substantial number of pupils who demonstrate an ability to cope with new school settings. We believe that this is particularly true in families where parents have not reflected negative or apprehensive concerns about a new school environment to their children. Parents who are very anxious about possible detrimental educational and social effects on their children of having to move communicate these concerns to their children. Therefore, it is incumbent on us to stress the point that perhaps the slight loss in continuity of achievement can be more than offset by new experiences in educational settings and interpersonal relations.

No good statistics are available on the relationship of delinquency to transiency in San Diego. Checks with the Probation Department and with the Juvenile Division of our San Diego Police Department indicate that law enforcement agencies do not keep records on the length of time a pupil has lived in the city or been in a particular school; therefore, it is difficult to identify transiency with delinquency. Our own school records also do not reveal any firm transiency-delinquency connections.

The immigration of students presents increasing problems for San Diego. We are close to the Mexican border and have large military installations, thus we receive many students from other countries. Many incoming students are monolingual in a language other than English, although a significant number are multilingual. Over sixty-five different languages are represented in our student population. The largest single language category is Spanish with over 8,000 students. The second largest is the Philippino group with over 800 pupils who speak Tagalog. The third largest group is Portuguese speaking, with well over 300 pupils. Fortunately a number of these pupils speak English with adequate facility so that they do not need special instruction, but 2,800 of our pupils require training in English as a second language or instruction in bilingually taught classes.

In summary, while our percentage of transient students is not large, we still serve more than 22,000 or 20% pupils per year who present some special problems related to transiency. These are the additional costs in health screening, counseling, record keeping, transmittal of records, and other management activities.

The special problems, briefly reiterated, are as follow:

1. Internal organization, staffing, planning, and programs to minimize educational interruption and personal readjustment due to a student's transiency.

2. Programs to take into account non-English speaking or multi-lingual pupils in the schools. (Parenthetically the California Constitution requires that the schools provide a free common education to all pupils who come to our schools, but the California Education Code does not confer authority on public schools to force proof of citizenship. Therefore, if we educate illegal aliens, we may be accused of "a gift of public funds.")

3. A system to accommodate pupils who have withdrawn from another school system without stated intention, preventing records from following him in a prompt fashion. Also, problems arise when other school districts refuse to send records of the immigrating student because of failure to pay library fines or other reasons.

Most of the problems listed could be alleviated significantly by national planning, cooperation, and adequate support for public education. Our problems are not necessarily unique, thus we continue to share concerns and possible solutions with other districts.